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U.S. Expels 25 Soviet Diplomats; Denies Link With Daniloff Affair

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 17 — The United States said today that it had given Moscow a list of 25 members of the Soviet Mission to the United Nations who must leave by Oct. 1.

This is the largest number of Soviet diplomats ever expelled by the United States at one time.

The White House and the State Department denied that the action was in retaliation for the restricted status in Moscow of an American journalist, Nicholas S. Daniloff, who is awaiting a possible trial on espionage charges.

Move to Show U.S. Toughness

The American step, officials said, is aimed at making make sure that the Soviet Union complies with a six-month-old order to reduce the size of its United Nations missions.

But a White House official said the decision to expel the 25 mission members and to do it in a publicized way was related to a desire to appear tough and to show that the United States was ready to put into effect retaliatory measures until Mr. Daniloff is given safe passage back home.

The White House official, who asked not to be identified, said that if the United States had linked the expulsion order to the Daniloff case, it would have raised questions about the United States' living up to its pact with the United Nations dealing with foreign missions in New York.

One official said the United States would not have chosen to expel the Soviet mission members if there had been a glimmer of hope in the Daniloff talks.

Several officials said negotiations in the Daniloff case had made no progress, with the Soviet Union insisting that the case be handled in parallel with that of Gennadi F. Zakharov, a Soviet employee of the United Nations, who is charged with espionage in New York. The United States says Mr. Daniloff was set up so the Soviet authorities would have a "hostage" to be exchanged for Mr. Zakharov.

The two men are out of jail, in the custody of their embassies, as the result of an agreement Friday.

Bernard Kalb, the State Department spokesman, in announcing the expulsion

sion of the 25 Soviet mission members said Moscow would probably take "a dim view" of the move and might retaliate by expelling American diplomats. This will produce "an appropriate American response," he said.

State Department officials said they were uncertain whether the Soviet Union would cancel the planned meetings here on Friday and Saturday between Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze.

Originally, the meetings were scheduled to determine whether there was enough common ground on arms control and other Soviet-American issues to justify a summit meeting between Mikhail S. Gorbachev and President Reagan later this year, and possibly to set a date.

Daniloff the First Item

Because of the Daniloff case, Mr. Shultz has said that he would devote the first part of the meeting with Mr. Shevardnadze to that issue, before taking up other aspects.

President Reagan, in a statement today on the arms control talks that resume in Geneva on Thursday, said the Shultz-Shevardnadze talks "can help to lay the groundwork for a second summit meeting between Mr. Gorbachev and myself in the U.S. later this year, as agreed at our first summit meeting in Geneva" last November.

"I want to emphasize, however, that the Soviet treatment of American journalist Nicholas Daniloff continues to limit severely what is achievable in our bilateral relations," Mr. Reagan added. "I therefore urge the Soviet Union to resolve this case promptly before it does even more damage to the relationship between our two countries."

March Order Is Recalled

The State Department said it had decided to name the Soviet mission members to be expelled because Moscow had not cooperated in cutting the mission's size voluntarily. Last March, the United States ordered the cut, on the ground that the number of Soviet personnel accredited to the United Nations was too large and posed "a threat to U.S. national security."

The United States declined to make public the names of the 25, or to say

how many were believed to have been engaged in espionage.

Mr. Shultz had signaled the action on Tuesday when he said that the United States had a "plan of action" if the Daniloff case was not resolved, and that "shoes" would begin to drop. Officials declined to say what the next steps might be.

In a related matter, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, an umbrella group, held rallies in a campaign to get one million signatures on a petition to insure that the question of Soviet Jews be discussed prominently in any summit meeting.

Morris B. Abram, conference chairman, met with Mr. Shultz today to stress the importance of the issue being raised with Mr. Shevardnadze. Mr. Abram said he was pleased by the assurances he received.

The number of Jews permitted to emigrate from the Soviet Union was 505 in the first eight months of 1986. Emigration for all Soviet citizens is heavily restricted, but Jews have continued to leave in small numbers since their exodus reached a high point in the late 1970's.

The action to expel 25 Soviet diplomats stems from a decision taken in March to reduce the size of the Soviet Mission to the United Nations as well as the smaller contingents from the Ukrainian and Byelorussian republics of the Soviet Union.

Under special arrangements dating from the beginnings of the United Nations at the end of World War II, the Soviet Union is represented by three missions — one from the central Government in Moscow and one each from the Ukraine and Byelorussia, which are two of the Soviet Union's constituent republics, or states.

In March, the United States said that there were altogether 275 officials in the three missions, including 243 in the Soviet Mission. The missions were ordered to cut their staffs to 170 over a two-year period.

This was to have been accomplished by cuts every six months. The first reduction of 25 was to occur by Oct. 1, and was intended to bring the size of the Soviet Mission from 243 to 218. At that time, the United States said it was confident that this could be worked out in a quiet way through attrition, and that no expulsions would be needed.

The Soviet Union protested, saying that the United States had no right to

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regulate the size of missions attached to the United Nations. Last Friday, at a news conference in New York, Aleksandr M. Belonogov, the chief Soviet delegate, said his Government was not prepared to comply.

"As a result, the U.S. has been obliged to take steps of its own to ensure compliance," Mr. Kalb, the State Department spokesman, said. "The United States approaches with the utmost seriousness its responsibilities as host country to the United Nations, and to individual missions to the United Nations. We will not, however, allow any state to abuse its U.N. membership to engage in actions detrimental to our security."

The move today marked a shift from the American position as stated on Friday. After Mr. Belonogov's comments, American spokesmen said, "The U.S. Mission has nothing to indicate that the Soviets are not going to meet the time schedule, although we understand that they are not going to give up their legal position."

Mr. Kalb said today that there were signs the Soviet Mission had quietly cut its staff size. He said the 25 on the State Department list would still have to leave, but if it was found that the total dropped below 218, more could be added later.

The order to cut the size of the Soviet missions does not affect the more than 400 Soviet citizens who, like Mr. Zakharov, are employed by the United Nations as international civil servants.